

## League of Agricultural and Equine Centers

### September 2016 Newsletter

We hope everyone is enjoying the onset of fall. This is a fun time of year with all the harvest festivals, Oktoberfests, and other fun events that happen this time of year. In this month's profile, we hear from Denise Alexander, who manages the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion. As you will read, she has put a lot of effort into adding non-agricultural events to her calendar, and this has paid off well. We also have an article on footing, featuring Mike from Riata Rake. Read on for these, recaps of some of our Symposium talks, and more!

#### **Member Profile: Denise Alexander**

*Facility Manager, Southeastern Livestock Pavilion*

Denise Alexander began working in the agricultural industry since college, and this experience along with working for Hilton Corporation for several years as a catering and special events director prepared her well for her current position of facility manager for the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion in Marion County, Florida. "I went to work for the Marion County Board of County Commissioners in the Visitors and Convention Bureau in 2011," she recalls. "In January 2013 they asked me to move to the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion. They wanted to increase the number of events held at this facility, and we increased our revenue by 200% the first six months because we added non-agricultural events."

Denise had a lot to work with having a facility that lent itself well to a variety of events. "With the covered arena and lots of parking, it is an easy sell for things like outdoor expos, and boat, car and truck shows. Dealers like the idea that they can keep their products and their audience under cover, out of the sun or rain, and still provide a large viewing area. Add some food and merchandise vendors, and it becomes a family event."

Now the facility has a very busy calendar. "We are currently booked 47 weeks out of 52," Denise explains. "We host several types of livestock events, including an annual bull sale, professional rodeos, a two-week-long Youth Fair, stock shows, five horse sales, and shows for smaller more unique animals like pigeons and pygmy goats. I also book five to six circuses, concerts, a Chili Cook-Off fundraiser, and three high school graduations. The Junior League does their annual three-day Autumn Festival with us, and we host several clinics for large and small animals. The Master Gardeners have two, three-day festivals each year, and we also have weddings, receptions, and graduation or retirement parties almost every weekend."

Of course, holding this many events requires managing a hard-working staff and staying efficient. "I have five staff members and an administrative assistant, and admittedly we are very busy," Denise says. "We are open seven days a week; however, I refuse to have my staff work on Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter. It is challenging to make it all work, but I am blessed with a fabulous staff. We implemented scheduling software, and that has been a tremendous asset."

Like many of our members, Denise has found her membership in the League to be invaluable. “When I first came to this facility, my director encouraged me to participate in The League. I attended my first League Symposium two years ago. I have become an advocate for the networking opportunities, the knowledge that is shared, and the friendships that I have made since joining The League. You cannot fail to improve when you surround yourself with knowledgeable professionals who want to help you. That’s what our members represent. I am fortunate to be part of this great organization.”

When she’s not working for the facility, Denise serves on several advisory boards for the agriculture and equine industry, and her family is an important aspect of her life. “I have a son who lives in Florida and is a safety director for a general contractor, and a newly married daughter who lives in California and is an operations manager for an investment management company. They are the two things that I am most proud of in my life. I am blessed.”

[Sidebar—place in its own box] **About the Southeastern Livestock Pavilion**

Currently, the Pavilion features a large covered arena that will seat 6,500 people. It is attached to the main barn, which has 226 permanent stalls, a sales arena that seats 816, practice arena, and four show office spaces. The property also has an auditorium that can seat 325 at banquet style tables, a smaller recreation hall which seats 175, a picnic pavilion, and open grass space. In June 2016, construction began on a 92,000 square foot covered arena and multi-purpose facility. The arena is designed for events with smaller spectator crowds, but the concrete pad can host car shows or vendor events, and will have temporary stall space for up to 125 horses. The construction of this phase will be complete by February 1, 2017, and will allow the facility to host multiple events simultaneously.

The Southeastern Livestock Pavilion is primarily funded through the Marion County Board of County Commissioners. However, the State of Florida has provided some financial support especially with regard to the major construction project.

**Feature Article: Maintaining Arena Footing**

One of the main purposes of having an arena is to provide great footing—footing that will be safe and comfortable for those who use the facility. Contrary to what those outside the industry might believe, dirt is never just dirt. Footing material, moisture content, and maintenance equipment all play significant roles in making sure those who use your facility are satisfied with the footing.

“One of the most important things is really recognizing, regardless of the footing material, the quality of sheer in an arena,” says Mike Powell, chairman and founder of Riata as well as the mind behind the Riata Rake. Sheer is the force that hold the footing together while pressure is

being applied, and can be seen in how well the horse is able to move off of the footing in any direction without having it slide from under their feet or cause too much impact.

The amount of sheer necessary will vary depending on the type of event. “For example,” says Mike, “in the reining world there’s a significant need for sheer in an arena for a number of reasons, but you don’t want so much sheer that you can’t do a slide stop.” The footing materials and the moisture content both greatly impact the sheer. Sand in an arena is made up of a combination of round or angular particles; if there are mostly round particles, the material will be non-sheer and slide out from under the horses’ feet, like so many ball bearings.

“Even if it’s a highly angular footing material, there’s still a variable amount of sheer depending on the amount of moisture. There is what I call a ‘sweet spot’ where you’ve got just enough sheer, but not so much that it gets mucky. Some arenas, depending upon the footing materials that they’ve brought in, are really hard to maintain because the sweet spot is so small.” According to Mike, one of the most common problems in an arena is too much clay content in the footing, which is highly volatile to differences in moisture. Non-angular sand or sand and gypsum can be added to help loosen the footing and widen the sweet spot.

Mike believes that many footing complaints come because a facility has either too much clay or too much sand content. “You can get a lot better sheer by putting some angular material in high-ball bearing sand, and that could be in the form of angular sand or decomposed granite. Then, with the right moisture content, you’ve got a really good surface that’s easy to maintain. It’s a wider sweet spot, so it won’t matter if it’s a little too dry or a little too wet. It’s got a wider period where it feels good, so I think that results in more satisfied competitors in an arena.”

When the right materials and moisture content are in place, the equipment used to maintain the arena becomes paramount. “The first thing is you’ve got to have a tool that has all the phases necessary to maintain an arena,” says Mike. Many tools on the market were made for seed-bed preparation and are not suitable for arena use; they may damage the arena base. Using a tool designed to groom the footing above the base but never undermine the base itself will result in less maintenance and more consistently great footing.

Mike suggests that features to look for are tines or conditioning rods that are fixed in space, and not variable due to spring-like qualities in things like S-tines which load up and then release, often disrupting the arena base. Another feature to look for is the ability to work both organic and synthetic materials, such as having curved tines which will allow materials like felt fibers to be evenly distributed in the footing and not forced to the base by straight swept-back tines.

Having fixed conditioning rods that won’t disrupt the base, the ability to level the arena, and a method of reintroducing compaction for sheer into the arena are all important features of an arena grooming tool. “You want the sheer so that you can move from it and perform well,” Mike says. “You can tell when a horse is in a high-quality arena and the footing’s just right because they move more confidently. They like a high-quality arena.”

## **Benefits of Membership: Certification Program**

The League of Agricultural and Equine Centers, in association with Middle Tennessee State University, worked to develop the Certified Manager of Equine Centers (CMEC) program to accomplish several distinct and important purposes. These purposes include providing incentive for professional improvement in equine center management, recognizing those who achieve the specific standards, and developing professional status in the field of equine center management.

Members of The League who are employed full-time as a general or facility manager at an equine center are eligible to apply for the certification process. The required 45 hours of core area education are available at The League's Annual Symposium. Earning a CMEC can be a fantastic benefit to you and your facility. For more information, [click here](#).

## **Symposium**

The League Symposium 2016 featured a wide range of topics and presentations, highlights of which will be shared here each month. Be aware that these sessions were highly informative with a lot of information, so we can only scratch the surface here. Many of the presentations are available to members only through the [website](#).

### **Managing HR Challenges In Today's Changing Environment**

*Presented by Angela Nemecek  
Oklahoma State Fair Park*

Managing human resources can be difficult when laws seem to be in constant flux and creating accurate expectations is make-or-break for an individual's success in a position. It all begins with the application.

Application "Do's" include asking for name, address, phone number, and email address. Asking questions pertinent to eligibility is also acceptable, such as having proper documentation to work in the U.S., being over 18 years old, inquiring about shift availability, convicted or pled guilty to a felony, and being able to perform essential functions with or without reasonable accommodation. Information about an individual's past can include inquiries into current employment and if that employer can be contacted, whether the individual was terminated or resigned, and asking for a resume or references. Personal information, such as date of birth, social security number, gender, race, religion or marital status should not be asked on an application.

Writing a good job description is crucial to protecting your company and finding the right people. Be clear and simple, and use your company's branding consistently. Information to include in a job description should include the title and reporting structure of the job, responsibilities and essential functions of the job, the knowledge, skills and abilities required, and the working conditions. Including the wage will bring in more qualified applicant groups.

When posting the job, consider using both internal and external resources. Internal resources include current employees, bulletin boards, an email blast to current employees, sending to business associates, or other forms of in-house communication. External resources include the company website or social media pages, as well as job search sites such as Indeed.com.

When a suitable candidate has been found, adequate communication is imperative to assure both parties have the same expectations. If applicable, it should be communicated that the offer is conditional upon a background check or other terms. Rate of pay and start date should always be clearly communicated and acknowledged by both parties. An official offer letter to be signed by the applicant, including rate of pay and start date, benefits and time off information, and other important information, is a good way to make sure these communication needs are being met.

### **Determining the Economic Importance of Visitor Events**

*Presented by Mike Carrier*

*Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau*

Being able to show the economic impact of events held in your facility can assist in getting grants and other funding by providing detailed information on the returns they can expect on an investment. Facilities should connect with a Convention & Visitors Bureau in their area and work together to gather information to show the value of your industry.

An economic impact report will show the money coming in versus the money being spent on an event, and enables one to explain factually and accurately what an event means to its community. It can include both local spending, people spending money in a concentrated time period and place, and out-of-town spending, or bringing money in from outside the city.

A basic economic impact report should include the date, number in attendance, number of days, direct spending and the local sales tax revenue. Direct spending includes money spent by the attendees, organizer, and exhibitor directly for or at the event itself. Indirect spending, which is harder to calculate, includes money indirectly spent because of the event, such as money spent at nearby restaurants, stores, or hotels by those involved.

Developing a program at a facility and identifying partners who can help to do economic impact studies consistently and reliably can be of great benefit to the facility and to the industries they serve. Keeping good records of what goes on in the facility will help. With a good economic impact study in hand, asking a city council for help becomes more feasible because the council can see exactly what benefits your facility and the events held there bring to the community.

**(Sponsors & Partners with links will go here)**

### **Upcoming League Events**

#### **The League Forum**

The League Forum is a round table teleconference sponsored bi-monthly by The League. Every other month a topic will be announced. Interested participants are asked to sign up through the

League office, [info@laec.info](mailto:info@laec.info) or 859-887-0033. A dial-in number and passcode will be sent the day prior to the call. It is not a toll free call. Long distance charges will accrue depending on your telephone calling plan. Each call will be moderated by a board member or CMEC graduate. Experts may be included on the call to give their knowledge of the specific topic. The times will be 2:00 eastern, 1:00 central, 12:00 mountain, 11:00 pacific and 10:00 Alaskan time.

Be sure to mark your calendars and contact the League office if you wish to be on a call.

#### *Upcoming Forum Dates*

Wednesday, October 5 – Project Funding

#### **The 2017 League Footing Academy & Symposium**

Plan now to attend the 2017 League Footing Academy & Symposium to be held in Jacksonville, Florida hosted by the Jacksonville Equestrian Center. The League Footing Academy will be held January 20-21, with the Symposium following January 22-25, 2017. Keep an eye out for more details!

#### **LEGIS Corner: Be Prepared**

When you are facing an emergency is not the time to be searching for important information. If your facility has faced a disaster, you don't want to have to rummage around for who you need to call to report a potential insurance claim.

In an emergency your first responsibility is to make sure your staff, exhibitors, and animals are getting the immediate attention they need, as well as securing your facility, equipment, and the like. Safety first. However, as soon as possible you need to notify your insurance agent or carrier. Sometimes there are emergency services available to you through your insurance policy, plus valuable advice for things to do, and not do in an emergency situation. Having a plan that is understood and discussed ahead of time will help ensure safety to all involved, and aid you with any insurance claims needed, which will help you get 100% operational faster.

We hope you won't have to face an emergency, but if you do please be prepared.